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Source: *The Journal of Race Development*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Apr., 1916), pp. 441-453

Published by:

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29738171>

Accessed: 01-08-2014 01:19 UTC

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JAPAN AND ISOTHERMAL EMPIRE

By Homer B. Hulbert

History seems to have demonstrated a law that permanent empire must be isothermal. One exception that comes to mind is Egypt, but in this case topographical conditions are so pronounced that north and south extension prevailed in spite of the general law. But Assyria, Babylonia, Phoenicia, Greece, Rome, Islam—they all spread east and west. When they ventured out of their home latitudes they courted disaster. The strength of Russia lies in her longitudinal expansion; stretching six thousand miles from east to west, with her back against the Arctic Circle, her position is the most enviable of any empire in the world. The British Empire is British only isothermally. New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Canada, the British Isles—these are the only British Empire that is really British. India and Egypt and the Straits Settlements are not genuine colonies; they are merely possessions. America, too, is pronouncedly isothermal. We have no ambitions, either latent or expressed, beyond our northern or our southern boundaries. The same is true of China although in that remarkable country other forces have worked against that homogeneity of population that seems to be the exclusive prerogative and fruit of isothermal empire.

But this law is further enforced in history by the fact that almost all non-isothermal empires have been ephemeral. The Goths conquered Rome but Rome swallowed them, digested them and forgot them. The Mongols swept south through China to India and founded the most extensive empire of which history speaks; and yet from Ghengiz Khan to Tamerlane was scarcely a hundred years. The Manchus, in turn, made quick conquest southward and held China two hundred and fifty-years, but during

that time instead of making China Manchu, China made the Manchu Chinese. The Holy Roman Empire was non-isothermal and ephemeral. Napoleon Bonaparte should have stayed within his own latitudes.

It would be interesting to adduce, as a corollary to this law, the fact that so many of the great civil or domestic wars of history have been waged from north to south, or *vice versa*. Upper and lower Egypt, Athens and Sparta, North Italy and South Italy, England and Scotland, Samaria and Judea, South Germany and Prussia, Cape Colony and the Transvaal, The Union and the Confederacy, Satsuma and the Northern Clans: these are partial and general cases but they help to show that latitude is the foe and longitude the friend of imperialistic ambition.

If we apply this law to the present situation in Japan we at once touch the most crucial and pregnant consideration that affects that people. Japan has no east and west; she is all north and south. From the Kurile Islands in the north which press hard upon the Arctic Circle she sweeps southward through her own main islands, then the Loo Choo group and finally Formosa, which impinges upon the tropics. This island chain is the Empire of Japan, comprising an area equal to that of Minnesota and Wisconsin combined. There is no place in all that line, with the possible exception of the Formosan jungles, where a few hours run by rail will not carry you its entire breath from east to west. I am omitting Korea now from this account, for reasons that will appear.

But Japan boasts to be the oldest empire in the world. If so, she challenges the law that has been cited. It must be remembered, however, that until within a generation Japan was virtually confined to latitudinal definitions far narrower than the United States. The islands of Kiushu, Shikoku and perhaps two-thirds of the island of Hondo comprised practically the whole of the Japanese Empire up to very recent times. The Kuriles, Saghalien, the Loo Choos, Formosa, and indeed Yezo itself, are but recent incorporations. It appears, then, that through all these centuries Japan has been measurably isothermal. There

is, however, another reason. Until the great change came in 1868 Japan had always been a congeries of loosely connected states even before this was accentuated by feudalism. This was a result of her topography. Until comparatively recent years it was almost as difficult for a native of Kiushiu to converse with a native of Yedo, for instance, as for a Cantonese to understand a Pekinese. Only in one classic instance, in the days of Hideyoshi, 1592, was the Japanese Empire so welded together that it could dare to embark upon an imperialistic career. And even this was primarily caused by the fact that Hideyoshi, in his sanguinary wars, had built up such a huge military machine that he feared that it would fall and crush him unless he should find for it some new field of enterprise. He was an Alexander or a Napoleon rather than a Charlemagne. With the death of that *parvenu* the whole structure collapsed like a house of cards. There was no correlation or homogeneity such as spells Empire.

The advent of feudalism of course accentuated the fragmentary character of the Empire, for the Emperor, or Mikado, lost all political or financial significance and the Shogun, with his seat in the far north, while powerful, was still little more than a *primus inter pares*.

It remains, then, that only in the most recent years has Japan become consolidated and has lost her isothermal character through the acquisition of sub-arctic and sub-tropical territory; and it is much too early in the game to announce that Japan is a permanency in the field of Empire.

But considering the remarkable progress that Japan has made along the line of material civilization one may be allowed to wonder whether there may not be something in her which renders nugatory this historic law of longitudinal development. The answer, so far as my observation and study go, is a decided negative. The Japanese are extremely sensitive to climatic conditions. They find it too cold to live in the Hokkaido and too hot in Formosa. The common people do not possess that ruggedness of physique or that ruggedness of character that can make them the indomitable adventurers and the patient empire makers

such as built the British Empire. Whatever they have done abroad has been done by government impulsion and initiative. It is said, probably with some approximation to truth, that half the Japanese in Manchuria go back to Japan to spend the winters. They cannot endure the bitter cold. Neither their houses, their clothing nor their methods of heating are in any way adapted to living much above the 40th parallel. Nor do they show any special adaptability in this respect. They cling to their old methods however ill suited to the conditions. The Koreans, for instance, developed a method of heating a house in winter that is ideal for their climatic conditions but the Japanese in Korea scorns to take a leaf from the Korean book and make himself comfortable. It is only from the West that Japan will borrow.

To say that there is no guarantee of permanency in the Japanese Empire would be venturesome; but if history has any lesson to teach it is certain that her Empire must be isothermal or it will go down. Whether the Japanese leaders have sensed this thing or whether it be merely intuitional and subconscious, there can be little doubt that this age-old instinct will explain some of the phenomena of modern Japanese expansion as nothing else can do. The taking of the Kuriles, Saghalien, the Loo Choos and Formosa were acts of national pride rather than the movement of a genuine imperialistic instinct, they are basically sources of weakness rather than strength, for it is axiomatic that the attempt to hold territory which cannot be predominantly settled by the people of the conquering power and be brought completely under the cultural dominion of that power is a very precarious experiment. Who can doubt that every day England, in the holding of Egypt and India, is giving hostages to fortune?

The taking of Korea, however, was directly in line with the law of isothermal expansion. And beyond Korea lies Manchuria and beyond Manchuria lies China. This seems to be the true line of her imperialistic ambition if she can so far divest herself of ethical restraints, so Teutonize herself, so to speak, as to embark upon an old-time career

of selfish conquest. Unfortunately no one can doubt that she is able to make her ethics bow to her ambition. This has been too fully demonstrated in Korea and Formosa to need any further proof. But right at this point we come to a new and startling consideration and one which must make the American pause and think, and it is to this consideration that I must address myself as being the sole purpose and aim of this paper.

The fundamental temper of Japan, her entire *cultus*, has been so thoroughly modified, or I might say crystallized, by seven hundred years of feudalism that she has taken herself entirely out of touch with all the rest of the Far East. The Chinese and the Koreans understand us far better than they do the Japanese. I might almost change the order of these words and say that the Chinese and the Koreans understand us better than the Japanese do. This is a proposition that requires analysis and definition; for, if it be true, there lies at the root of it the whole possibility of trouble between America and Japan.

The feudalism of Japan was more perfect than that of Europe both in its centrifugal effect and in its power to build up social barriers. In Europe the intellectual, the educational, forces were in the hands of the Church, and the Church always and consistently worked against the centrifugal power of feudalism. It was wholly centripetal. The physical power was in the hands of the feudal barons each of whom strove with might and main to preserve his own essential independence. This antithesis, this mighty duel held society in some sort of equilibrium. The scholar was on the level of the common people as regards physical force and the feudal baron was on the same level as regards intellectual power. Neither one ever got wholly out of touch with the *common man*. One profoundly significant result was the establishment of the institution called Chivalry whereby the physical arm was dedicated to support of the Church and the championship of right. In spite of all its excesses and its crudities, it kept alive the flame of altruism upon the central altar of society and robbed feudalism of its legitimate fruit, the apotheosis of self, even as it robbed the Church of her despotic power.

In Japan, on the other hand the feudal baron and his retainer, the far famed Samurai, held the book in one hand and the sword in the other. In that one class was centered finally the whole intellectual and physical power of the nation. For a time, even for centuries, the Buddhistic Church in Japan was the patron of literature and the arts but under the pressure of luxury and self indulgence it forfeited this preëminence and placed it in the hands of the aristocracy. The result was that there was no equilibrium such as saved Europe. Feudalism ran its normal course unchanged and resulted in the sublimation of human pride. The time came when the common people had no rights that the Samurai was bound to respect. There yawned between the upper and the lower class a gulf as wide as that between the Brahmin and the pariah of India. If anyone thinks that this gap can be bridged in fifty years or that essential feudalism has seen its finish in Japan let him ask any well-informed Japanese whether a man may aspire to any high official position in the army of Japan without the sanction of the Choshu Clan or in the Navy of Japan without the sanction of the Satsuma Clan.

But more immediately significant to us is another phase of feudal development—its effect upon the mercantile class. In Europe the feudal status relegated the merchant to a humble place. The warrior being *the* man, *par excellence*, it was natural that the farmer, the artisan and the merchant must take a lower seat. This being so it followed inevitably that the more perfect the feudalism the more deeply must these humble workers be submerged. This is what happened, and in Japan the aristocratic scorn of the constructive forces of society became almost an obsession. Since taxes for the most part were paid in kind the economic position of the farmer was far better than that of the artisan or the merchant. To buy something with money and then sell it at a profit was a thing contemptible in the eyes of the Samurai. The mere trader was despised and spit upon. He played much the same rôle as did the Jew in Spain in the Middle Ages. This is the basic cause of the low commercial ethics of the Japanese. They are not to blame for

it. They are the product of a system, and it is the system that is at fault. But be the blame where it may, this fact bears very directly upon the matter of Japan's national expansion. It is one thing to march through a densely populated country with the drawn sword and raise the conquering flag, but it is another and a very different thing to settle down in that country and compete economically and industrially with the people who are already there. The Japanese can do it neither in Korea nor Manchuria,—much less in China. They never would have secured a commercial foothold in Manchuria had they not by special means, which were described to me in detail by every American consul in that territory, secured a practical monopoly of foreign trade. It was a shining case of trade “following the flag;” and, like the wedding of Hamlet's foster-father, it “followed hard upon.”

But, added to their lack of the deeper commercial instinct as compared with that of the Chinese, is the handicapping fact that the Japanese in their suicidal race for Western innovations have developed a standard of living much more costly than that of their conquered neighbors. If they were possessed of superior commercial ability or thrift they might sustain themselves in superior style among the denizens of Korea and Manchuria, but the truth is that they have no such ability and are compelled to depend upon their government to furnish them with some special facilities, some inside track, some virtual monopoly whereby they can pluck the fruit without the labor of climbing the tree. This truth is basic and demonstrated, and forms the pivot upon which turns the whole argument as regards the future economic development of Japan. The impregnable wall against which Japan's westward extension beats in vain is not political but economic. If all the people of Japan were distributed throughout China and were given enough money to start in business and were then left to work out their own economic destiny unaided by government interposition, they would all starve within five years. They could no more compete on even terms with the Chinese than a last year's college graduate

could compete with John Wanamaker. It is the teeming, thrifty millions of China that form the *bête noire* of the Japanese.

It was otherwise with us. We found on this continent a sparse and a scattered population of savages vastly below the Anglo-Saxon in economic ability and social cohesion. They were holding unmeasured tracts of arable land without developing them. I do not condone the acts of severity which they suffered at our hands but there came a time when Europe overflowed into this continent. We did not want to fight the aborigine but it soon became apparent that agricultural industry and feral industry were wholly incompatible with each other and the Indian had to go. Either we had to sink to their level or they had to rise to ours. Neither was humanly possible under the circumstances and the result was a foregone conclusion.

How vastly different is it with Japan's ambitions on the mainland of Asia. She there finds a civilization as highly articulated as her own, a commercial and industrial instinct more subtle than her own, a thrift that is tireless and indomitable.

It is possible for Japan by military intimidation to sequester some outlying fringes of China's trade but will anyone believe that she can, even with all her armies, though unopposed, fasten such monopoly and such special privilege upon the entire Chinese people? It is hopeless and the Japanese leaders know it is hopeless, though probably they will not admit it even to themselves.

Added to this are two factors of grave importance. First the anger and the bitter hatred that Japan has aroused in China by her facile use of England's and Russia's pre-occupation, in this present war, to sink her claws deep into the living flesh of China. And China's hatred has very tangible methods of expression. The commercial machinery of China is so delicately adjusted and so splendidly coördinated that it can bring to bear all sorts of invisible but potent pressure upon Japan's program of commercial absorption. While Japan has been raising up an aristocracy of fighters China has been rearing an aristocracy of traders.

The loyalty of the Chinese merchant to his clan, to his business connections and to his written contract is as fine and as creditable as is the *bushido* of Japan; and, withal, it is a thousand times more constructive. The other factor is, of course, that the peoples of Europe and America must have, and will eventually have, an open door and an equal door to the trade of China. There can be no better evidence of the essential smallness of Japan than this idea of "making hay while the sun shines." There come to my mind the words of Lafcadio Hearn, than whom Japan never had a more ardent admirer. In one of his letters to Prof. Chamberlain he says:

'Smallness,' after all, is the word. What is there large in Japan but Fuji and the ranges? His gods are ghosts only, who eat tiny repasts. His cities are vast collections of huts. As for his imaginations, what are large about them? His poems are only tiny pictures. His deepest sentiment of heroism he shares with the ant and the wasp. His romances are mediocrally tiresome yet without the strength of our medievalism—always details—details—infinite in number but infinitesimal in character. Lilliput is not tall enough to see far. Cosmic emotions do not come to Lilliputians. Did any Japanese ever feel such an emotion? Will any ever feel one? Then again the comparative difference in mass between mere feeling in Western and Japanese people. When I think of what is expressed by a musical emotion, a mere memory of Verdi, by a Greek marble, a religious exaltation, a gothic church, a poem—how enormous a difference in *volume* of life.

Again he says:

The Northern capacity for autonomy is immemorially old, racial and physiologically represented by an enormous capacity for self-restraint by judgment. One would suppose on a superficial view that the highest self-restraint was exemplified in the Japanese race but I am convinced that it is not. Remove the necessity for religious and social submission and they will show no restraint at all. Why? Because the self-restraint of the Northern sort requires *large* mindedness. It is rendered possible only by large, straight, powerful apprehension of general truths, and the general effect of general causes. The ability to think in relations alone accounts for the existence of England. Will the Japanese learn to think in relations, *as a people*? Not before the sun dies, I fear.

This genius for the microscopic is perhaps one of their most persistent and characteristic qualities. It shows in their marvelous attention to detail, in the *bijouterie* of their art and in every phase of life. As the Koreans put it very aptly "A pin prick must be attended to though worms gnaw the heart unnoted." Some of the leading American and English military experts, who followed closely the Japan-Russia war, said that the Japanese always fought with the book of German tactics before them, and whenever a situation was reached where the book did not tell them what to do they waited until the position shifted to one with which the book dealt. Then they moved again. But for this, the battle of Mukden would have ended the war. This I only know from others and not from personal observation, but it fits in very well with the general aptitude of Japan for the minutiae of affairs in distinction from the large and comprehensive.

After the end of that war I pointed out in my little magazine, the *Korea Review*, that if Japan desired to secure the largest and most permanent benefit from the war her best course would be to treat Korea so honestly and humanely that it would prove Japan's capacity for handling an alien people and would serve as an object lesson for China to see. Such a course while demanding self-restraint would have knit China to Japan with bands of steel and today we would be facing a united Far East. Here again is where Japan failed to see the large thing. She had no vision except for the small immediate rewards and thus she forfeited the leadership of the Far East.

But turning now to Japan's relations with America we find a very different state of affairs. We see now why Japan should cast longing eyes upon Hawaii and yearn for the flesh-pots of California. Here she sees a comparatively small population, society in a very fluid state and a style of living so much higher than her own that her people can easily underbid us and still live better by far than they can at home. Economic pressure, like water, will seek its level, and so long as Japanese can live more cheaply than we can so long will the pressure in this direc-

tion continue. It is quite safe to say that from the standpoint of economics and the law of isothermal development this is the line of least resistance for that people. Australia and New Zealand share with us the sinister possibility.

I know the arguments which are advanced by those who plead for the friendliest relation between ourselves and Japan and I yield to no one in my desire that such relations shall exist, but we cannot for that reason blind ourselves to economic facts. It is admitted by the advocates and apologists of Japan that she must seek an outlet for her swarming population and her splendid energy. Where then are they to swarm? It cannot be to Korea, Manchuria and China, for reasons that I have indicated. It cannot be to Saghalien nor to Formosa nor to the Philippine Islands, for reasons which I have given. If there is any truth in history or any philosophy of racial expansion there is but one direction in which Japan can move with any hope of securing permanent empire and that is eastward across the Pacific.

But I do not believe that she can expand in this direction. There are too many obstacles, too many contingencies, and it is to these that I must call attention in closing. It is a curious fact that Japan contains in her political and economic make-up too elements which are of coördinate importance and yet are mutually contradictory. They are *bushido* and industrialism. The patriotism of the Japanese is the old feudal loyalty transferred from an immediate and local overlord to the Emperor. It is a religion with them and the whole force of the bureaucracy of Japan is intent upon upholding and inculcating the fiction that the Emperor is a divine being. It is taught in their schools and fostered in their homes. The very fabric of the political loyalty of the masses in Japan depends upon the preservation of this idea. At this point Lafcadio Hearn comes in with a pregnant statement. He says:

"The official classes grow restive under the necessity of keeping up the fiction that the Emperor is divine. When the common people begin to doubt it they will stop paying taxes." With gradual enlightenment and broadening outlook

the common Japanese must inevitably give up this fiction, and it is much to be feared that they will discover on how slender a thread hangs this national allegiance. The better people in Japan are greatly distressed over the fact that the upper classes there, having discarded the restraints of their old religious systems, have substituted nothing in their place. Industrialism by fostering the acquisitive spirit, unchecked by ethical influences, becomes a determined foe of *bushido*, and it is for this reason that the cry has been raised "Back to the spirit of Old Japan." But in these modern days military power must be backed by financial power in order to be effective, and industrialism is the only avenue to such financial independence. It must be remembered that the assessed wealth of Japan is something like \$12,000,000,000 or approximately the same as one year's entire returns from the farm products of this country. Reckoning the national income of Japan's people at one billion dollars we find that the annual revenue of the Central government is more than one-third the entire income of the people. Add to this the cost of local government and it is easy to demonstrate that the Japanese pay to their government in taxes each year one-half of their entire income. But a further fact is of some significance. The concentration of wealth in Japan is greater than anything even seen in this country. It is probable that if Mr. Rockefeller or Mr. Carnegie owned as great a fraction of the wealth of this country as Count Mitsui does of the wealth of Japan he would be worth some fifteen billion dollars. Now it is perfectly safe to say that the little coterie of extremely wealthy men in Japan do not turn over one-half of their incomes to the government. The result is that the ordinary taxpayers have to pay much more than half.

This thing cannot continue indefinitely. The people will not patiently endure such a crushing burden. It is at this point that we touch the greatest danger of war between Japan and America. If the time comes, as seems only too probable, when the aristocracy of Japan sees that the people are ready to revolt against the repression and the excessive taxation now imposed by the government,

they, the governing party, will be compelled to divert the attention of the people and thus save themselves from disaster by making a foreign war. This is historically the favorite way by which just such oligarchies have attempted to preserve their prestige. Not that they want to fight nor that they are sanguine of success but because it is the only chance. If such a time should come there can be little doubt that war would be inaugurated along the lines of least resistance, along lines that would be most likely to please the proletariat, along the lines that would be likely to result in the most *eclat* and the highest chances of immediate monetary returns. If Japan were to fight she must fight for quick money, for otherwise she must collapse financially. There is only one direction in which they could look for any of these results and that is toward America.

No one should deceive himself by supposing that any previous friendship, or any preponderance of material resources, or any ethical considerations would stand for a minute in the way. If Germany was able in a hour to doff the habiliments of Christian civilization and don the harness of the Hun how much more readily might Japan determine to reap a golden harvest from our unprotected West. I am no alarmist but I want the American people to look facts squarely in the face. I plead for such a degree of protection on our Pacific Coast as shall effectively put an end to any remotest hope of successful aggression on the part of Japan.